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T A R G E T S T U D Y O F N O R T H V I E T N A M

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

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1. Nature of the Economy and its Vulnerabilities

The North Vietnamese economy is basically one of subsistence agriculture with only a small modern industrial sector concentrated in a few centers, including Hanoi, Haiphong, Nam Dinh, Viet Tri, and Thai Nguyen. This small industrial sector is heavily dependent on imports of machinery and raw materials, primarily from Communist China and the USSR; on the other hand, North Vietnam generally imports little food, depending very largely on domestic production to feed its population of about 18 million. The main transportation links with other countries are via the port of Haiphong and the rail line to China via Dong Dang. North Vietnam's capacity for producing military items, many of which are crudely fashioned, is restricted to grenades, mines, mortars, and ammunition for small arms. All of North Vietnam's heavy military equipment and most of its small arms and ammunition are obtained by imports from Communist countries.

Hence, the Viet Cong military effort is not primarily dependent upon the North Vietnamese economy for equipment and supplies. Nor are Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam significantly dependent upon the major military installations in the north, such as airfields and military headquarters. The Viet Cong logistic requirements are relatively small; it obtains food and some military supplies in South Vietnam.

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Potential vulnerabilities, translated into possible target systems, are discussed below and in the annexes appended to this report. The neutralization of key industrial, transport and military targets could constitute a serious blow to the Hanoi regime and adversely affect its determination to carry on the present conflict in the face of mounting escalation of the conflict. Of the potential target systems discussed, we note that the crippling of the key transport and military facilities (discussed in Part III of Annex 1 and in Annex 2) would complicate the problems of continued logistic support for large-scale operations in South Vietnam, reduce North Vietnam's defensive capabilities (particularly air defense) and markedly slow down the level of operations of the modern industrial sector in North Vietnam.

However, we have not been able to identify a target system in North Vietnam which, if successfully attacked, would carry with it a higher degree of assurance of crippling the effectiveness of Viet Cong ground forces presently deployed in South Vietnam.

2. Potential Industrial and Transport Target Systems

Electric power generating facilities, heavy industry, transportation, petroleum storage depots, and the port of Haiphong are discussed as possible target systems in Annex 1. The principal conclusions are:

- a. Eight powerplants account for nearly 80 percent of electric generating capacity and serve about 90 percent of North Vietnam's

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industry. Severe damage to these plants would have an immediate and long lasting effect on industrial production and would impair operations at the port of Haiphong.

b. Five heavy industry plants account for North Vietnam's steel capacity (presently under construction), virtually all cement and fertilizer output, and the only large modern machine building capacity. All of these facilities represent key Soviet or Chinese aid projects and they have military significance apart from their symbolic value.

c. Six rail/highway bridges and the port of Haiphong are the major transportation targets because the flow of supplies from China and the USSR flows over these routes. Interdiction of the key bridges together with the entrance to the port of Haiphong would not only slow down the importation of military supplies, but also greatly reduce imports of those raw materials on which North Vietnamese industry depends. There is also a major petroleum storage area in Hanoi and one in Haiphong. Loss of POL stocks and severe damage to the country's largest storage facilities would curtail motor, air and water transportation and could therefore affect military activities as well as the operation of the economy.

3. Potential Military Targets

There are four major airfields in North Vietnam which normally accomodate military aircraft (MIG fighters and IL-28 bombers) as well as transports for military and civilian use. Effective

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neutralization of these facilities and aircraft would temporarily cripple the North Vietnamese tactical and air transport capability, as well as their ability to strike targets in South Vietnam. Replacements could be provided by the USSR and/or Communist China; after repair a fighter defense and bomber offense could be reconstituted quickly. Hence, repeated interdiction would be required. (See Annex 2)

Neutralization of airfields, the Hanoi SAM sites and other key military facilities would have two predictable effects: (1) It would serve notice of U.S. determination to attack military targets anywhere in North Vietnam, and (2) It would reduce U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft losses if follow-up air attacks were planned on key industrial or transport targets, since most of these key installations are in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

4. Vulnerability of Rice Crop to Flooding

The probable consequences of attacking North Vietnamese rice supplies by flooding the Tonkin delta as a consequence of breaching its levees is considered in Annex 3. We have not made a study of the operational feasibility of breaching the levees in the Red River (Tonkin) delta. However, a successful attack might severely flood as much as half a million hectares,* and losses could run to

* A hectare is 2.471 acres.

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three quarters of a million tons of rice. If only the main levees were breached, and the secondary levee system remained, rice losses probably would be on the order of 200,000 tons. We believe the Communist Chinese could make up this deficit from their own production of 75-80 million tons of rice and supply their own people by additional imports of wheat. Wheat is freely available on the world market, and the Chinese (as well as the Russians) have ample foreign exchange to purchase the quantities required by North Vietnam.

If a completely successful attack were to achieve a significant reduction in rice supplies in North Vietnam, which the Chinese or Soviets were unsuccessful in making good for some unknown reason, the Hanoi regime would undoubtedly impose selective rationing. The military forces and essential industrial and government workers would continue to be fed adequately. It would be the least important sectors of the population, such as the old people, who would suffer deprivation. Hence, an attack on the rice crop by flooding the Tonkin delta would be unlikely to achieve a significant military impact. Further, it would almost certainly incense world public opinion against the United States as the perpetrator of an inhuman act, and could strengthen the determination of the North Vietnamese to resist.

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5. Other Target Studies

Annex 4 is a brief annotated bibliography of other target studies on North Vietnam, including possible sabotage targets. Additional details on certain potential target systems are available in these studies, particularly the 7 April 1965 analysis entitled, Location and Significance of Electric Powerplants in the Hanoi-Haiphong Power Network of North Vietnam.

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